

MARTHA AND MARY**NO. 3469****A SERMON****PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 29, 1915****DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON****AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON**

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.”
Luke 10:41-42

I THINK I see the Man of Sorrows as He is traversing the high road, attended by His few friends and disciples. Where will He refresh Himself when the time is come to cease from toil and take food? Where is His house? Surely the Great Prophet has some place wherein to rest? Alas! He has none! “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.”

However, what He has not of His own, that friends will afford Him. Martha, a disciple—not a full-grown one, but one who had begun to learn something of the truth—meets Him at the door of her house, at the entrance to the village of Bethany, and she invites Him to come in. Jesus Christ, who had often accepted an invitation from an enemy, was glad to accept one from a friend.

So He goes into the house, with His friend Lazarus, and sits down. No sooner is He sat down, with His disciples around Him, than He falls to preaching. A sermon is none the worse for being preached in a private house. Martha and Mary stood listening to Him. Stood, did I say? Mary sits down at His feet, and Martha, having listened for a little while, recollects that she has many family cares. The dinner must be got ready, so she betakes herself into her room, and is very busy with her needful cookery.

She wants a little extra help, and she comes back into the room and sees Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet. Seeming rather irritable, Martha appeals to Jesus, “Dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone?”—hoping that the Master would chide Mary—but He rather defends her, and implies a gentle censure upon Martha, when He says, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.”

This little repartee must have surprised Martha. She did not expect it would come to herself being reproved and Mary being commended. So it was—and the incident, we think, may give us some profitable instruction. Let us see if we can find it out.

I. WE WILL TAKE THE CASE OF MARTHA FIRST.

There is no reason to find any great fault with her. Martha was a good woman. The Lord “Jesus loved Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus.” Since He appreciated Martha’s character, it is not for us to depreciate it. Martha was an excellent housewife. Perhaps a little too fussy—I know not what better word to use—a little too particular about the minutiae. Troubling and vexing herself about domestic arrangements in spreading the board and serving the provisions. She was, it mayhap, a little too prone to disquiet her mind by the scrupulousness of her tastes—still she was an admirable woman, one who kept her house in good order.

No mean prize is it, especially for the working man, to have a Martha for his wife—one who orders well her household. Indeed, so commendable is this in Christian women, that the apostle might well say, “Let them first learn to show piety at home.” If your children’s stockings are not darned, if their clothes are not mended, if the buttons are not put on their dresses at the proper time, I would not give much for your Christian example.

A housewife should see to these details and before all others, for neatness and industry should be the woman whose heart is right before the Lord. One or two friends, I see, are smiling. Let them smile if they like. I only hope they will mind my homely advice and attend to their home duties—then they will

make their husbands smile with satisfaction and their families will look brighter. If they have ungodly husbands, it will tend to paint religion in fairer colors, and to commend it to their esteem.

In what respect, then, was Martha to blame? Well, though she got a little censure, you see Jesus does not upbraid her severely. His words are very kind—"Martha, Martha." We do not address women thus familiarly by name, you know, unless we are very intimate with them. I would not venture to call you by your Christian name, because I do not know you well enough. We only do that with our friends and kinsfolk. So in the kindest way, making Himself very familiar with her, Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things"

'Twas little to say. He only indicated the fact, without uttering half as much complaint as she made against her sister Mary. What was her fault, then? Well, we think it was just this—the Lord Jesus Christ did not often come round those parts preaching. He had a large diocese—He was the travelling Bishop of the whole land. And it did seem to cast a little slight on His ministry for Martha to think more of the beef that was being roasted and the meats that were being prepared for the table, than of that rich food, that bread which came from heaven, which He was giving them.

If a preacher came to us but every now and then, dear brethren, I think the Word of God would become so precious to us that we might be pardoned neglecting some family cares in order to listen to it. But Martha, you see, *put her family cares somewhat before the precious Word of Christ*. And besides, she seems rather to have looked at her religion as a doing something which Christ needed of her, than as a taking the one thing needful which she needed from Christ.

Of such people there is now no lack. I trust they are in the faith, though they are but babes in grace. Their practical piety consists, to a large extent, in what they ought to do for Christ, and what He expects from them, rather than in realizing that delightful sense which some believers have of what Jesus has done for them.

Now what I can do for Christ is, I am sure, very little, and is a poor subject to engross all my thoughts. What He did for me is so amazing, so matchless, so unspeakable, so glorious, that I ought to give that the major part of my attention. I may sometimes run with Martha to do what Christ needs of me, but I think I ought more frequently to sit with Mary to receive from Christ what I need from Him.

Your religion is not of a first-class order if it be altogether looking at your practice, and not at the finished and perfect work of Christ. There will be at least a tendency in you to legality, and that tendency is so dangerous that it deserves to be rebuked. Though I would rebuke it as tenderly as I can, yet it must be somewhat sharply, that you may be sound in the faith.

Martha, Martha, Christ does not stand in need of you half as much as you do of Him. It is meet and proper for you to think how you may economize time to attend the house of prayer, and how you shall bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and how you shall save a little money to give to the poor or to Christ's church. All these things are right. It is well you should do them, but oh! remember, Christ did more for you.

Let your thoughts be fixed on His cross, on His life, on His death, or else you will get to be a Pharisee. Ah! Martha, you will get to think that you are saved by your own doings—and then it is all over with you if you ever come to think that. This was one of Martha's faults. She seemed to be more anxious about what she should do for Christ than she was grateful about what Christ had done for her.

Then, you see, *this led her to fret*, and that is always wrong. She began to be peevish and be vexed. Oh! she wanted to have a fine entertainment for Christ. She had out all the best dishes and she would have all the repast served in the daintiest manner. She would have nothing put on the table but what was the best of the best for such a one as her Lord.

So far this was right and much to her credit, but as little mishaps are apt to cause great annoyances, so she got her mind troubled and her temper irritated. Thus she fretted and vexed herself till the day that ought to have been all happiness and sunshine, because Christ was come, became all worry and hurry, distracting to her mind and distressing to her nerves.

Now that is wrong and lamentable. Remember, Christian, whatever you have to do, you should always cast all your care on Him who cares for you. Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, make known your wants unto God. You are to be thoughtful, diligent, prudent, but anxious, carking, vexatious cares you are to turn out of the house as soon as possible, or else you will hear your Master say, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.”

You must not be fretful about trifles, provoked with other people, or disquieted with yourself. Your fretting will not make things better—the ruffling of your temper will not smooth the current of affairs. Be calm. Be quiet. Be patient. Then the multitude of your labors will not disturb the serenity of your mind, though many things may have to be done, the much care may be greatly lightened, if it is not altogether avoided.

The next thing to blame in Martha was that while she was earnest herself in serving the Lord, *she began to upbraid her dear sister Mary*. Some minds are naturally censorious and prone to fault-finding. Others there be that, under exciting emotions, begin to criticize, censure, and criminate. Nay, Martha, you have no right to judge Mary. You are doing what you think to be right—she is doing what she thinks to be right—let her alone.

There are some earnest young men I know who would have everybody quite as zealous as themselves, and so would I—but there may happen to be some Christians who cannot, through infirmity, do quite as much. And some of these young men will grow out of temper with them and perhaps, speak disrespectful words of them. This is not right of you.

You must not judge another man’s servant—to his own master he shall stand or fall. Martha, Martha, Martha, you have no business to find fault with Mary. And you busy Christians, you good, busy people, that do so much for Jesus, and wish you could do more, do not you sometimes grow angry because others are not as zealous as you are. Never let a bad temper be mixed with earnestness, for it will be like a dead fly in a pot of ointment—it will spoil the whole. Be not rash, Martha, in your judgment of Mary?

I fear, too, that *Martha a little censured her Lord*—and was not that a hard thing to do? Let us read the words, for fear I should do her an injustice. “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me.” Was not that an unkind thing to say? “Jesus, do You not care?”

Of course, He was always caring for every one of them. They never had a care but what He had it before them. All their burdens He was willing to bear. All their sufferings He was willing to relieve. And He came into this world on purpose to redeem them with His blood. It was a hard thing to say, “Master, dost thou not care?”

And so it is with some Christians—they do not set their eyes enough upon Christ’s work and are all too busy with work for Christ. Hence they will even upbraid the Master Himself. These elder brothers—and Martha, you know, was an elder sister—these elder brothers say, “Lo, these many years have I served thee, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I should make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.” This is a bad spirit, a very bad spirit.

I heard of a man, some time ago, calling himself a minister of Christ, who said he did not believe in revivals, nor did he look for any good from preaching in theaters, for, said he, “If God designs to bless the church, it stands to reason that He will first save those people who usually go to a place of worship, and not the riff-raff.”

Now I did not like that speech. I hope he was a good man, but I am sure he spoke in a bad spirit, and it was with something like that spirit Martha spoke. She seemed to feel, “I have done all sorts of things. I have been busy and anxious, and I have taken no rest. Nobody knows how hot I have made myself, working with my own hands, and superintending other people’s work. I have hurried up and down stairs, with all the toil and all the responsibility upon me—yet here is Mary, doing nothing, and Christ is just as pleased with her as if she were doing a thousand things.”

Now I think Christ said, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things,” to rebuke the cropping up of a little of that ill-spirit which is always culpable and mischievous whenever it appears.

To close with Martha—I hope we have not been too severe upon her conduct, or reflected too much upon her character—*she may be used as a picture of the self-righteous*. Perhaps there are such here. There is a John or a James among you, perhaps, who says, “I go to my place of worship very punctually. I order my household with propriety. I conduct my business with integrity. I give to the poor. I subscribe to charities. I take my part in works of benevolence,” and so on.

Ah! friends, you are cumbered with much serving, and you will never get to heaven that way. But one thing is needful, and that is the finished righteousness of Christ. Or is it Martha, there, that good woman that I think I heard say, “Well, I have brought up my children creditably. I have always behaved in such a manner that the neighbors give me a good character. I have never neglected my religious duties, so I shall go to heaven, I trust.”

Ah! Martha, Martha! Those good things of yours will sink you. You cannot swim to heaven with them. One thing is needful—and that one thing is the finished righteousness of Jesus. Leave these fine things that cumber you, and come to Jesus just as you are, and you shall have the good part which cannot be taken from you.

But it is treating Martha too badly to make her a picture of the self-righteous. I shall only notice now, that *she is only like what some of us sometimes are*. When the minister comes into the pulpit he sometimes feels—at least I myself do—a great deal of concern about the friends that have to stand about the lights, about the draughts, and numerous other trivial matters. Full often I reproach myself for being thus cumbered about many things. Instead of being like Martha, the minister should be like Mary, sitting at Jesus’ feet, and giving his undivided attention to the Master’s words.

This is too often the case with the deacons and the Elders. They may be thinking about how arrangements may be made for the convenience of the congregation, and filled with anxiety that all may go off well, especially at extraordinary services. They are exposed to the same temptation that Martha was. I dare say, my dear brethren who carry round the bread and the cup at the Lord’s Supper sometimes feel that they miss some of Mary’s repose, and get some of Martha’s cares in attending to that service. They would rather, perhaps, sit with you in the pew, like Mary, to enjoy the feast, rather than be like Martha to serve the tables.

Others of you are thinking about your children, your sons and your daughters. As you are anxiously praying the Lord to bless the Word to their souls, you, too, may sometimes get into such an anxious state as to be like Martha. Oh! it will be well for you if you can take the attitude of Mary—sitting at the Savior’s feet, profound in reverence, yet familiar in communion with your blessed Lord—awed by His presence, cheered by His smile, impressed with His Word, delighted with His voice, catching the faintest syllable which shall fall from His divine lips—finding in Him enough to enthrall your soul with sacred love, and leaving Him to care for you, while you only care to sit at His feet and learn of Him—stationed where no grievous looks or hasty words of Martha can tempt you to move away.

II. LET US NOW TURN TO THE CHARACTER OF MARY and see if we can find anything in that for practical use.

Do not think that Mary was lazy or that she preferred hearing sermons to doing her work. On another occasion she proved that she did not withhold her service or spare her substance, for she anointed the head of our Lord. She showed that she did not mind a sacrifice, for she did for Jesus what only one other person ever did—she anointed Him.

But here was the point about Mary’s character—may it be found in yours and in mine—*she gave her attention less to the care of the body than to a care for the soul*. In truth, she loved to drink of the living water which Christ gives to those who are thirsty. She attended to the one thing needful. Alas! the world does not think that the care of the soul is the one thing needful. As a good old writer says, “The world thinks this is the one thing needless.”

They can dispense with religion, because to their notion, it is an encumbrance. We have heard some people call money the one thing needful. They despise religion and find their treasure in vanities that perish with the using and their joy in the things of earth that pass away like the rippling current or the revolving seasons.

Religion is the one thing needful to us all. It is the one thing needful to the minister. Without true religion in his heart, he is an impostor. He has taken upon himself an errand upon which the Master never sent him—a responsibility which shall crush his soul lower than the lowest hell. Lord, have mercy upon those ministers who dare to preach what they have not felt themselves.

But religion is also the one thing needful for the hearers—so needful, indeed, that if they have it not, all the sermons and prayers in the world will be but as fuel for their condemnation. We must have you, my dear hearers, brought to lay hold on Christ, or else impressions and professions, formality and morality, vows and votive offerings will but drug your conscience, cheat your hope, and end in black despair.

True religion is the one thing needful for the aged. I see some here whose bald heads and grey hairs admonish them that they are drawing near to the grave. Ah! my aged friend, what will you do, where will you be a little while hence, unless you have a Savior to rest upon? In the swellings of Jordan, how will you fare, if there is no kind spirit near you to say, “I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God”?

This, too, is the one thing needful for the middle-aged. Busy with care, toiling from morning till night as some of you are—if you have not the grace of God in your hearts, and the comforts of the Holy Spirit in your experience, what will you do? You will bring up your children for Satan. You will be the instruments of unrighteousness. All your works shall but earn for you the wages of heavy sorrow and bitter lamentations—your present life an endless regret.

And how needful is true religion for the young! It makes the young man wise. It makes the maiden fair.

*“A flower, when offered in the bud,
Is no vain sacrifice.”*

We should not wait until we have grown old and decrepit, and then bring to God the blind and the lame for a sacrifice. Let us give Him the young bullock. Let us offer to Him the lambs of a year old. Since some die while they are young, let us repent while we are young, and believe in Jesus while the charm of springtime enlivens us, for it is the one thing needful to have faith in Him.

There are other things, you will tell me, that are needful. I answer, Yes, but this is the especially, pre-eminently, and universally needful thing. Imagine a man in the condemned cell at Newgate. There he sits, busy writing letters. He is going to die a felon’s death. Knowing it will cruelly grieve his family, he is doing the best thing he can do—writing letters of consolation to them and trying to settle his little affairs.

In comes the King’s messenger and he says to the man—only the man is too busy to listen to him—“I have his Majesty’s free pardon.” The man says, “I cannot attend to you. I cannot attend to you. I have got a letter to write to my wife.” He goes on with his writing, but he is interrupted again with the news of his Majesty’s free pardon. “I cannot attend to it,” he says, “I have to write to my children, for I have to die next Monday,” and he goes on writing.

Now do you not see, if the man will but stop and think, the free pardon will do far more for him than all his letters can? And if he shall but get that, he can attend to all the rest by and by. So is it with faith. A free pardon is offered by God, but you say, “Oh! but I have other things to look to.” I tell you you can look to them afterwards, but while the angel of mercy stands by and presents you with a free pardon, I pray you take the one thing needful and mind the other things in due time.

There is a wreck yonder, a wreck far out upon the waste salt sea, and on it are men who are starving, till the bones start through their skin. They have hoisted a flag upon a pole. Those poor creatures are

almost destitute of clothing—the salt sea washes them, and at night they are all but frozen to death, and they only preserve their lives by huddling one upon another.

These people need a thousand things, you tell me. They want some generous diet to restore their flesh. They want their friends. They want their native country. They want their families and households. They want fresh clothing. Yes, but I tell you one thing is needful—they want a friendly sail and if they can but see a ship in the distance, and that ship can come to them, they have all they want.

And so you that are looking after bread, and after your families, and so on—oh! this is all well, but still, while you are on the raft, and are perishing, what you really want is Christ, who, like a friendly sail in the distance, comes to save you and is willing to take you on board His ship at once, and to give you all you want.

One thing is needful. Oh! Jane, lay you hold onto that. And John, and Thomas, and William, and Margaret—any of you, all of you—do the same. Leave other things for a little while. You know you can work and pray. You can go about your business and yet have faith in Christ. This will not interfere with your household cares. But do, I pray you, imitate Mary in getting hold of the all-important, the absolutely necessary one thing—a living faith in a living Savior. This was the first reason why Mary was commended—she got a hold of the one thing needful.

The next thing she was commended for was this—*it was her own choice*—“Mary hath chosen the good part.” Some of our captious friends will be saying, “Ah! Ah! Are you now going to preach free-will now and tell us that it is man’s choice?” Oh! brethren, you know what I think of man’s will—that it is a slave, bound in iron fetters—but yet God forbid that I should alter Scripture to suit anybody’s doctrine, or even my own.

Mary did choose the better part, and every man that is saved chooses to be saved. I know that at the back of his choice, and as the cause of his choice, there is God’s choice, but still the grace of God always imparts grace to the man’s heart. No one is dragged to heaven. Nor does anyone ever go to Christ against his will—the soul must be made willing in the day of God’s power. This is the triumph of God’s grace—not that He takes men to heaven as we might carry machines there, but that He expressly acts upon the human mind, leaves it as free as ever it was, and yet makes it perfectly obedient to His own will.

Mary chooses. God had chosen her in old eternity and therefore, she chooses Him.

*“Chosen of Him ere time began,
I choose Him in return.”*

Now let us ask, for we cannot merit any commendation, have we chosen Christ? Have we chosen His cause, His truth, His cross? If you have got a religion that is not a matter of choice to you, I am afraid it is not of much use. If you attend any religion because you must—if you follow it of necessity, from a sense of duty, from the goadings of fear, or from the dictates of custom, I am afraid, when your religion is put in the scales, it will be found wanting. It must be a matter of solemn and deliberate choice with you.

Now which would be your present choice? Should the pleasures of this world be all daintily painted before your eyes—every joy that could regale the senses—music to charm the ear, perfumes for the nostrils, sweets for the mouth, and landscapes for the eyes, on the one side, and on the other side, let Christ and His cross be put before you—which would you chose? I know which some of you have chosen—may God alter your choice.

But I trust there are some here who can say, “Choose? Why, I have once for all chosen Christ. I have counted the cost and I reckon the reproach of Christ to be greater treasures than all the riches of Egypt.” You are commended. Christ gently speaks to you a word of love when He says, “Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken from her.”

Mary was commended, too, because she *had chosen the good part*. It is good to know Christ, good in every sense—it is good for ourselves—it is good toward God, and good toward man. It is good in the sense of comfort. It is good in the sense of morality. Nobody can say anything against true religion who judges fairly. Even the judge upon the bench dares not say that to have a new heart and a right spirit is not good. True religion has in it everything that is lovely and of good repute, honest in the sight of men and devout in the sight of God.

Oh! Mary, now you have left your Martha-cares, and are resting wholly and only on Jesus, you have this for your heart's content, that you have not merely chosen the good, but that you have chosen the best of all the good—the good part with which no other portion can bear the least comparison.

There is one other commendation, and with that we close. *Mary had chosen that which could never be taken away from her*. Of the many things which some of us take a pride and a pleasure in possessing, we have not many that cannot be easily taken away. Though we may have a fair character, any lying slanderer may take that away for a time. We have a house—the flames may take that away and leave nothing but a heap of ashes. We have a beloved spouse—grim death may stretch her in the coffin. We have dear children, the delight of our eyes, but we know that mortal is written on their brows. We have friends with whom we take sweet counsel, but they are dropping off one by one.

“Who hath not lost a friend?”

We have many comforts of which adversity might deprive us in a moment. Those that were once highly esteemed amongst men are soon forgotten, even by their neighbors, their choice companions do not know them in the day of their poverty. Riches take to themselves wings and flee away. All the creature things we have may be taken away from us.

The poor man, perhaps, thinks that he is exempt from the peril because he has no riches to be taken from him, but he has other things than silver and gold which pertain to the life that now is—and they will all be taken away. And at last there will come the greatest thief, Death, the Spoiler. When he finds us weak, stretched upon the bed and utterly helpless, how he will take all our things away.

He will clutch the miser's gold. Though he seeks with eager grasp to retain it, death will tear it away from his expiring grip. He will take away from the dying one all dear friends, his consort and offspring. Closing his eyes and blinding them, he shall see no more forever. Stopping his ears and sealing them, he shall hear no more the way of loving consolation. Touching his heart and arresting its beat, his desire will cease. All things shall then be taken away.

But there is one thing—oh, that we may choose it—there is one thing that neither life nor death can take away. It is the good part, a good hope in Jesus, a true faith in Jesus, a perfect love to Jesus, a vital union with Jesus. Come, death, you may clutch, but you cannot take away that which Jesus holds with living hands. Come, you devils of hell, you may seek to tear away these jewels from me, but—

***“Stronger is He than death or hell,
His Majesty's unsearchable.”***

And He defies the sons of darkness and repels all their rage. These things cannot be taken away from you.

I think I see you going through the dark valley. Doubts, like troops of robbers, seek to slay you, but they cannot take away your jewels. The great robber comes, Diabolus, the old accuser of the brethren, and he fumbles for your treasures, and he takes away some of your comforts, but he cannot take away your faith. The great dogs of hell howl at you as though they would tear you in pieces, but those dogs cannot rob you of your good part.

I think I see you in that river, when the water comes even to the chin, and you are ready to say, “I sink in deep mire where there is no standing”—but even that black stream cannot drown your comfort.

You have a hope that swims above the biggest billow. You have a song that sounds louder than the wailing of the tempest. No fatal shipwreck shall I fear, for Christ, my treasure, is with me there, and He preserves Himself and preserves me. Having chosen the good part, which cannot be taken from me, I am safe.

And now, dear friends, the question comes—question which I hope all who mean to be communicants at the Lord’s Table, especially will ask themselves—“Have I chosen the good part?” Forget religious cares. Forget ecclesiastical troubles. Forget all that you have to do for Christ, and only think of what Christ has done for you. Have you chosen Him? Can you say in the language of that hymn, which makes us so happy when we sing it—

*“On Christ, the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand”?*

If so, come you saints, come and sit down. Be as lowly as Mary was. If there is a low place in the valley, the water is sure to run into it. And if there be a lowly heart, grace is sure to pour in there, though it should flow nowhere else. Go and take your seat at Jesu’s feet. Come to the table and sit at Jesu’s feet and have fellowship with Him.

And oh! you that have not chosen this good part, remember that in having despised it, you have despised your own mercy. The day will come when you will wish to alter your choice. May God change it now! If there be one here who says, “Oh! I wish I could have the good part.” I tell you, you may have it. If there is one soul here that desires to be saved, you may be saved. Christ desires you more than you can possibly desire Him. Christ died for sinners—you are a sinner—trust Him and you are saved. Then your sins are gone, His righteousness covers you with imperial purple, and you stand an heir of heaven, an adopted child of God.

*“Oh! believe the record true,
God to you His Son hath given.”*

Trust in His blood. Trust in His merits and you shall be saved. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

JOHN 11:45-57

Lazarus had been publicly raised from the dead. A great number of persons saw the miracle and there was never any question about its having been wrought.

Verses 45-46. *Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*

We could hardly have conceived it possible that men would have been guilty of such conduct as this to post off to Christ’s enemies and lay it as an accusation against Him, that He had raised a man from the dead.

47-48. *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

They pretended that if Jesus Christ gathered to Himself a great party, the Romans would take umbrage at it—pounce upon the whole nation and destroy it, for fear of its revolting from under their sway. A gross falsehood throughout.

49-50. *And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all. Nor consider that it is expedients for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.*

That was his advice. You are, none of you, up to the mark. You do not handle this thing rightly. Let us kill this man. Let Him be put to death—not that He deserves it, but that it is expedient that it should be, lest our nation should be destroyed—and this is the way that governors and kings have been accustomed to think. Not, “Is it right?” But “Is it expedient?” And we may always pray to God that we may have a Government that will do that which is right, and not be guided by the evil direction of that which is expedient.

One has well said that if the death of a righteous man would save ten thousand, yet it would be an atrocious thing that he should be put to death unwillingly for the saving of any. The right is, after all, expedient. Yet Caiaphas did not know what he said. He was speaking a great truth.

51. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation.

He did not understand his own words. He was saying a great deal more than he meant to say—for it was expedient—blessedly expedient—that Jesus should die willingly and of His own accord, giving Himself up to death for the sake of His people.

52-53. And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

One bold wicked man can often sway the counsels of men who are equally bad, but more cowardly. It had not yet come to this—that they would hurt Him to the death, but now they take counsel to put Him to death.

54. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples.

We do not find that He wrought miracles there or preached, but in a holy and devout retirement, it may be, He prepared His mind for the last great week—the week of His passion and His death. It is generally best for us to imitate Him in this—and when we have some great work to do—something that will need all the grace that we can get, it is well to make a retreat. Get into retirement and school the heart, and seek to drink in fresh strength that we may be prepared for that which lies before us.

55-56. And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?

They had heard much of Him in the country. Country people coming to town want to hear the great minister—to see the Great Prophet. So that is their question, “Will He come to the feast?”

57. Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should shew it, that they might take him.

They could not deny the miracle—they could arrest and punish the miracle-worker.

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